



April 26, 2023

Hall of Fame: Leaders and Legends of the Blindness Field  
American Printing House for the Blind  
1839 Frankfort Avenue  
Louisville, KY 40206

RE: Nomination of Dr. Marc Maurer

Dear Selection Committee Members:

It is my honor to write in support of the nomination of Dr. Marc Maurer, whom I have known for nearly fifty years. While I will share something of his accomplishments in the blindness field, please allow me to begin by describing the personal impact this remarkable man has had on my life.

I first met Marc Maurer in 1975, when I was a freshman at Ball State University. Although I was going through the motions of my first year of college, I was still reeling from my sudden vision loss, which was the result of being shot during my senior year in high school on my way home from a basketball game. I did not truly believe that the future held anything good for me. The only blind person I knew about in my hometown lived with his family and was driven to a different location each day, where he would then stand and solicit money from passers-by. I had received some training with a white cane, but I rarely used it on campus; instead, I carried a walking cane of the kind that formally dressed gentlemen used to sport as a fashion accessory more than a walking or mobility aid. All of that began to change when I met Marc and Patti Maurer.

Dr. Maurer had come to visit Ball State from the University of Indiana, where he was pursuing a law degree. He had come to recruit me and others to form a new student division for the Indiana affiliate of the National Federation of the Blind, and to help us launch its first fundraiser, which involved selling candy. I think many of us personally bought and ate most of the candy ourselves, but that is not the primary reason I remember the event. What struck me was how the Maurers used their white canes with grace and confidence on a campus with which they were not familiar. Indeed, they did everything with confidence. They were comfortable with their blindness. As I talked with Dr. Maurer, he explained to me that there was no need for me to feel ashamed of my blindness or try to hide it. He told me that it was respectable to be blind. I asked him about the career prospects for blind people, and he invited me to attend the Indiana state convention, in part so that I could meet blind people pursuing all kinds of careers. I accepted this invitation. The networking I did at that convention exposed me to many successful blind people. Just as important, from my perspective, these people were laughing, joking, and having a good time. They were talking about the various trials and triumphs of ordinary life, conversations that did not focus

on their blindness or the limitations that I thought blindness imposed. Many were attending with their spouses and children. I wanted to be like these blind people. I wanted the competence, confidence, and joy with which they approached their lives.

Prior to becoming blind, I had planned to go into the heating and air-conditioning business with my brother, but I thought my vision loss foreclosed such a career. Through contact with the National Federation of the Blind, I learned of the business opportunities available through the Randolph-Sheppard program, and I pursued that avenue with Dr. Maurer's personal encouragement. My success in the program spurred me to pursue other business ventures, and I now operate three businesses. One of these entrepreneurial pursuits is providing orientation and mobility instruction to blind people; I am now very different from the frightened and insecure young man who would not use a white cane. My participation in the National Federation of the Blind has also grown. I did not necessarily see myself as a leader of the movement. Dr. Maurer thought otherwise, detecting potential in me that I did not perceive in myself. It was his personal support that encouraged me to run for president of the National Federation of the Blind of Indiana in 1996 and for the national board of directors in 2000. I now serve as second vice-president of the national organization.

In short, in every way that matters, Dr. Maurer has had a profound and positive impact on my life. When I met him in 1975, I did not believe that I could have the wonderful life I have now, with successful businesses, my long marriage to my wife Jean (who is a leader in her own right and with whom I have raised a beautiful family), and a fulfilling leadership role in the organization that continues to help blind people live the lives we want. Marc Maurer set an example for me to emulate, never wavered from his faith in me, and provided mentorship and friendship that was critical to my personal growth. And I know that he has done the same for countless others, not only through his work and leadership but through thousands upon thousands of personal interactions, from reading Braille to blind children to taking the time to write to, call, or visit people who were filled with fear and despair as they faced vision loss.

Of course, Dr. Maurer's impact is not merely personal. As a member of the Federation's national board, I worked closely with Marc Maurer on projects he dreamed of creating and mobilized to create. He established educational programs in science, technology, engineering, math (STEM), and art. These innovative efforts included encouraging the development of tactile books, such as the groundbreaking *Touch the Universe*, which contained tactile renderings of images taken by the Hubble Space Telescope. Another example was the building of programs with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) like "Rocket On," where blind mentors worked with high school blind youth to build and launch sounding rockets from NASA's Wallops Island Flight Facility. He expanded those initial efforts by undertaking the largest STEM gathering of blind youth ever at the Johns Hopkins University, where nearly two hundred blind youth worked with blind mentors for a week in science and engineering-related pursuits. This event—known as the NFB Youth Slam—has been repeated at the University of Maryland and Towson University. The NFB Youth Slam has sparked many partnerships in the field and inspired many to pursue advanced degrees in STEM. Equally as important, it gave blind youth the opportunity to do real hands-on science and realize that their career interests were in other fields—the true value of informed choice. He led the evolution of the next generation of text recognition with Ray Kurzweil by establishing the KNFB Reader product line, while at the same time encouraging mainstream companies like Microsoft and Google to build this capacity into their products. He said consistently

that our goal is mainstream access to information. We find the fruits of those seeds coming into being this year as the dawning AI revolution spawns many new applications for blind people. He led the effort to build a car that a blind person could drive starting in 2000, when he was the only person saying this was possible. When the Federation successfully put a car and a blind driver on the track at Daytona in January 2011, he recognized that this was a key to unlocking accessibility in the driverless car space. He sent Mark Riccobono, America's blind driver, to meet with the leaders in the self-driving industry to make sure blind people were included from the beginning of their development cycles. Marc Maurer championed the dreams of blind people and found ways to invest in them, whether it was supporting the first blind person to summit Mt. Everest or coming to the aid of young blind parents in Missouri when their baby was taken away. He was central in getting the United States Congress to authorize the minting of a coin celebrating Braille, and then he assembled a team to implement new Braille literacy programs. He agreed to save the National Braille Competency Test from the Library of Congress, which had largely failed in its implementation. That effort rallied many leaders across the field of blindness, who worked together to establish a test that was turned over to the National Blindness Professional Certification Board for long-term benefit to the field. Teachers across the nation have secured their demonstration of competency in Braille through this work. He recognized the need for enhanced Braille instruction and built what is today the largest Braille enrichment program for youth anywhere in the world—the Braille Enrichment for Literacy and Learning Academy of the National Federation of the Blind.

I have mentioned only a few examples of Dr. Maurer's belief in the blind and his ability to bring us together for collective action to the benefit of all blind people. As a national board member, I was often nervous about how we would accomplish the big ideas he challenged us to pursue. Every time I was skeptical, he showed me how to expand my thinking about what was possible. In all of these ways, he has profoundly changed the blindness field and our society as a whole. At the same time, it would be an injustice to this great man to fail to acknowledge his personal qualities as well. For as long as I have known him, and indeed even longer, my friend and mentor Marc Maurer has exemplified belief in blind people not only through his professional roles and accomplishments, but in his everyday interaction with so many of us. I have read that the late Fred Rogers, creator and star of the beloved children's television show "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood," encouraged adult audiences to take a moment to thank the people who had loved them into being. Dr. Marc Maurer is one of the people who loved me into being, and I know that he did the same for many others. For this, as well as his many other accomplishments, it is my firm conviction that he merits inclusion in the Hall of Fame. I thank you for your consideration and hope that you agree.

Cordially,

Ron Brown, Second Vice President  
National Federation of the Blind  
6010 Winnpeny Lane  
Indianapolis, IN 46220